

Historic Gold Rush Community Plans for a Healthier Future

by: Carlene Maggio

SUMMARY

The CA4Health vision is to promote health through healthy communities. Tuolumne County recognizes that we are responsible for making our own healthy choices in the context of the environments and norms of our communities. Local leaders have made a commitment to include health as a measure of successful community planning, engaging government to support individuals in make healthier choices. By building a Healthy Communities Element into its General Plan, Tuolumne County has provided a roadmap to a healthier future for its residents.



CHALLENGE

Tuolumne is a small, rural county nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains of Central California. While pastoral and peaceful, the beautiful setting masks health challenges for its 55,000 residents. Communities grew out of the historic mining camps of the California Gold Rush. Today, features such as sidewalks, bike lanes and walking trails that make communities safe and inviting for active transportation are largely non-

existent. Transportation is difficult due to winding mountain roads, severe weather conditions and high tourism, but convenient access to groceries and health care is an even greater test. In addition, tobacco use rates in Tuolumne County are high; a 2012 telephone survey of tobacco use revealed smoking rates twice the state average, and almost half of households registered at least one tobacco user.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

CA4Health, the Public Health Institute's Community Transformation Grant, works with counties in California with populations less than 500,000.

For more information, visit www.CA4Health.org. Get involved and help make your county a healthier one!

"Chronic disease prevention isn't the sole purview of the traditional health care system anymore. We're lucky to live in a community where leaders have embraced the important role they play in building healthy places."

- Todd Stolp, MD, County Health Officer

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SOLUTION

The forces that have shaped our communities are propelled by economics and government entities, with public input. When CA4Health, a Community Transformation Grant initiative, began in Tuolumne County, the county was just beginning an update to the General Plan. Leaders in the Tuolumne County Public Health, Community Resources, and Transportation Departments discussed a Health in All Policies approach to community planning. These agencies collaborated to systematically review health-related policies already in place in the General Plan, and then built on those with evidence-based recommendations for additional measures to be included in the County's vision for a healthier future.

RESULTS

The proposed General Plan update was presented to the Board of Supervisors and was approved in late 2013. The recommended policy changes resulted in the creation of a new section of the General Plan called the Healthy Communities Element which was approved in May 2014 and will impact over 49,000 people. The comprehensive health policies and goals written into the new plan include encouraging convenient opportunities for physical activity for residents of all ages; establishing a sidewalk priority and trail plan that provides for the safety and mobility of pedestrians, students, and cyclists; planning for and promoting easy access to fresh produce and healthier beverages for residents in new developments; and updating the Clean Indoor Air Ordinance to support and encourage smoke-free multi-unit housing.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Building a Healthy Communities Element into the County's General Plan is only a first step on the road to expanding healthy options for our communities. New ordinances will emerge from the principles articulated in the Healthy Communities Element, with input from the partnering agencies and the County Board of Supervisors. The Transportation Council's newly established Active Transportation Coordinator will continue to promote sidewalk and trail initiatives, the Tobacco Control Coalition will advance ordinance changes to build stronger secondhand smoke protections in multi-unit housing, and developers will work with the Community Resources Agency to seek ways to facilitate access to more nutritious food and beverages in new developments.